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Online Auction Services Orders: An Order Librarian's Reflections on OLAS

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graphic and fiscal controls of this new process.

My first encounter with the extremely fluid e-world of **OLAS** occurred in July 2000, when the North Carolina Collection expressed interest in acquiring a **Thomas Wolfe** book signed by **Ernest Hemingway**. In preparation for this new experience, I registered with **eBay.com** and worked with the Curator of the North Carolina Collection to place a bid. In spite of our efforts, we were outbid three times—even after bidding as high as \$2511. A few months later, however, the Library did successfully bid, order and receive its first **OLAS** order. On behalf of the Photographic Archivist, I placed a bid on **eBay** for a photograph of African-Americans taken in 1903. Because the seller was not set up to accept a credit card payment, I could not use my state-issued Visa Purchasing Card (which would have been the quickest, easiest and most convenient method of payment). I explored the option of indirectly paying the seller through **PayPal.com**, but—after consulting with the Director of Financial Planning and Administrative Services—we decided (due to some snags) that I would not use **PayPal** to prepay the seller at that point in time. Consequently, the order was handled as a “classical prepayment”—a term I coined for prepaying vendors with checks (as opposed to using a credit card). This method of prepayment is a rather cumbersome and time-consuming process due to the Library’s restrictive prepayment policy and the many steps—not to mention handling by various departments—it involves. The item was received approximately a month after the order record was created and released in Innopac.

The next several **eBay** bids (for various items, including a 1694 New England coin, a North Carolina obsolete coin and photographs of African-Americans dating back to the 19th century)—placed on behalf of (or by) the Photographic Archivist or the Keeper of the North Carolina Collection Gallery—proved successful and the firm order transactions were performed in a similar manner. The sellers (who almost always required prepayment) were prepaid with checks. The items were usually received a few weeks after the order records were created and released. Purchase orders were attached to the “invoices” (comprised of emails from the sellers indicating the total price and the item) and delivered to Accounting staff, who would forward the paperwork to the University Accounts Payable Department (which would actually cut the check). In spite of some snags and the complications of relying on a classical prepayment method (ill-suited for the **OLAS** process, since sellers expected payment in a timely manner, in addition to the fact the buyer is obligated to buy the item when the bid is successful and has only three

days to make arrangements with the seller), the new workflow became somewhat routine, though extraneous to the larger firm order operation.

A breakthrough in the process occurred in December 2000, when I indirectly prepaid a seller through **PayPal.com**. Many **eBay** sellers are, in fact, set up to accept payments through **PayPal.com** or **BidPay.com**—the former’s Website announces that it’s “The way to receive and send money online” and the latter’s Website states its more specific focus in allowing its users to “pay for your auction by money order.” After receiving approval from the Director of Financial Planning and Administrative Services, I registered with **PayPal.com** and completed an online form which resulted in paying the seller. While I’m not completely clear on how this works, **PayPal** (according to its Website) only requires that the buyer enter the seller’s email address and the amount—“The recipient gets an email that says ‘You’ve Got Cash!’...[they] can then collect their money by clicking a link in the email. Relieved that I could finally transcend the classical prepayment process, I was hopeful that I could now expedite and simplify the **OLAS** workflow. Alas, my sense of triumph was deflated during a subsequent **OLAS** transaction (resulting in the acquisition of a medal from the 1939 **New York World’s Fair**) when I discovered that the seller could not accept a payment through **PayPal**. Once again, I was forced to revert to the classical prepayment process—and the seller was eventually prepaid with a check. In the next two **eBay** orders/transactions, the sellers did accept **PayPal** payments, so my hopes of using **PayPal** to pay most sellers were renewed. But I was disconcerted when I hit a new snag—one that required almost Herculean efforts to overcome. In the course of trying to pay for a photo of “Chang & Eng Siamese Twins P.T. Barnum,” **PayPal** informed me that I reached a \$250 limit. This surprised me in spite of the fact that the fine print of the User Agreement stated, “Unverified users are limited to \$250 of spending until they confirm an email address and bank account”—a minor detail that I glossed over in my zealous haste to set up an account with **PayPal**. In order to raise this “spending limit,” I was instructed to “add bank account” information—i.e., bank name, account type, bank routing number, checking/savings account, etc. Baffled by this new and annoying obstacle, I used **BidPay** to pay the seller (in spite of the \$10 fee) and then consulted with the Director of Financial Planning and Administrative Services. She in turn referred me to the Purchasing Card Administrator. I contacted her, inquiring if the bank who issued the card could possibly relay this bank account information (so I could thereby fulfill the “verification” requirement and raise the spending limit). I voiced my skepticism that this could be done because it would be information regarding a specific individual account—but I hoped that I would receive a

response that would allow me to raise the limit and untie my hands. The reply I received was both unexpected and disconcerting. She reported that, according to the Director of Internal Audit, “**PayPal** is a service organization and we cannot use this vendor.” Moreover, “...we cannot pay for services on the purchasing [state-issued Visa] card.” I was stunned by this because I did not regard **PayPal** as a service (in the sense of an agency that provides a non-physical product), but as a vendor (albeit, a virtual one) we paid to purchase material for the collection (in much the same manner that we would pay other vendors to purchase the requested material directly from the publisher, distributor or producer and supply it to the Library). The prohibition, of course, also extended to **Bidpay.com** and essentially resulted in a moratorium on **OLAS** orders until it could be resolved.

Months later, the Director of Financial Planning and Administrative Services obtained approval from the Director of Internal Audit for using the state-issued Visa to prepay these third-party “services” after issuing a justification for the utilization of these Websites. This development signified a pivotal point in the **OLAS** process. The Director of Financial Planning and Administrative Services issued a policy statement and procedures for **OLAS** transactions. The new policy shifted the responsibility of the actual bidding to the selectors and made the excellent point that “Since the nature of such purchases fall outside the main business stream employed by Acquisitions for obtaining library materials, the standard procedures used to purchase most materials are not appropriate for on-line auction purchases and create inefficiencies.” The objective of the new procedures was to “accomplish two goals”: assigning “the various tasks/responsibilities required to participate in and complete such purchases assigned to the appropriate department” and “Maintaining internal controls at a level that will satisfy audit standards.” Selectors were “given the authority to initiate such purchases and to handle the bidding process [in accordance with the procedures]...In order to provide as much flexibility in using this process as possible...” In other words, the selectors were now the designated bidders.

I supplemented these procedures with internal guidelines designed to clarify details of the workflow. It seemed that this internal documentation was important because the Searching Specialist was assigned to serve as my backup (in the event that I was not available to coordinate the firm order placement after the auction closed). Also, the selectors might benefit from clarification of their roles and the steps in the process. In a nutshell, the internal documentation summarized the following sequence: the selector identifies the item in **OLAS**, decides on the maximum bid, notifies the Order Librarian and Searching

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Specialist (who then works out the payment, order replacement and shipping logistics).

At that point, it appeared that the **OLAS** gods were smiling on us—a long overdue smile. **PayPal**'s "Initial Spending Limit" fortuitously and mysteriously vanished—or, to be more accurate, was raised—when I logged into my account in August 2001 (I concluded from this that the limit is apparently cyclical, though I was initially given the impression that it was permanent). And, in one transaction (to my pleasant surprise) the selector persuaded the seller to ship us the item prior to receiving payment, so I could bypass both **PayPal** and **BidPay** (the latter has a smaller limit of \$500 per item) as well as the classical prepayment process. The **OLAS** gods did not smile on us, however, when I attempted (on behalf of the Music Library) to place a bid for a manuscript autographed by **Robert Schumann** that was being auctioned on **Sothebys.com**. After completing the basic registration process, I discovered that I needed to complete a "signature lot registration application" (apparently, a separate and special registration process) and furnish a letter of reference from a financial institution. We considered the option of having an agent place the bid for us, but then decided not to proceed with the bid after learning that we did not have enough money in the selected fund to purchase the manuscript. Incidentally, **Sotheby's** Website has since apparently merged with **eBay** (the new URL is <http://sothebys.ebay.com/>). This online partnership is described as a "joint online destination."

Many of the frustrations we experienced with **OLAS** have resulted from imposing the standard firm order placement, receipt and

payment procedures (established, in many respects, to satisfy stringent auditing requirements) on the dynamic, 24/7 realm of online auctions where buyers and sellers have three days (after the auction closes) to work out the payment/shipping logistics, and sellers almost always expect to be promptly paid in advance. Fortunately—and thanks to the efforts of our Director of Financial Planning and Administrative Services—we were finally granted permission to use third-party online organizations such as **PayPal** (which was recently acquired by **eBay**) to pay the sellers under certain circumstances. The **OLAS** policy and procedures evolved in a trial-and-error process, as a result of consulting with various departments and trying to conform to university procedures.

While much attention has justifiably been focused on electronic resources, there appears to be a dearth of literature and discussion on the challenges faced by a library trying to purchase material won on an online auction such as **eBay**. Given the great variety of rare material offered in online auctions and the needs of special collections to acquire these esoteric items, I think more focus on **OLAS** is called for and hope this article might be useful to other acquisitions professionals and paraprofessionals preparing to take the plunge into **OLAS**.

Other acquisitions librarians and paraprofessionals planning to take this plunge would be well-advised to work out the procedures in advance, and clearly define the roles of all relevant parties. Based on our experience (which may or may not be applicable in other institutions), I can outline the following basic steps:

- Selector identifies item for the collection and places bid (or requests that acquisitions staff place the bid) and notifies acquisitions staff mem-

ber responsible for coordinating **OLAS** orders

- Selector forwards any email notification from **Online Auction Service** regarding status of bid—especially, after auction's close—and indicates fund to use

- Acquisitions staff member contacts **OLAS** seller and negotiates payment logistics (stating preference to receive the item with an invoice, but not expecting seller's agreement to supply in this manner)

- Acquisitions staff member creates an order record in the automated acquisitions (or integrated) system to encumber funds and to provide bibliographic control

- If prepayment is necessary, Acquisitions staff member opts to prepay with a library-issued credit card if seller is willing and able to accept a direct credit card payment

- If the seller is not willing and able to accept a direct credit card payment, Acquisitions will use **PayPal** or **BidPay** to indirectly pay seller (if this is an acceptable option for all concerned), or prepay seller with a check

- Acquisitions staff member conveys purchase order number and ship-to address to the seller and requests receipt and/or packing slip indicating order number with the material

Finally, I urge you to determine if using **PayPal** or **BidPay** to indirectly pay sellers are acceptable options for your institution prior to your first transaction. These Websites are valuable and reliable resources—if you are permitted to utilize them. Good luck with **OLAS!**

Digital Reference: A New Library Paradigm or the Emperor's New Clothes

by **Steve McKinzie** (Social Science Librarian, Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA) <mckinzie@dickinson.edu> and **Jonathan D. Lauer** (Library Director, Murray Library, Messiah College, Grantham, PA) <jlauer@messiah.edu>

Every so often the library profession loses its head over some peripheral issue and goes bonkers, often suggesting that current collection development practices have to be revamped, overhauled or possibly scrapped. It is like that now, if you have been following some of the profession's fascination with digital reference service. The term "digital reference service" isn't easy to define, but it can best be understood as reference in "which

people submit their questions and have them answered by a library staff member through some electronic means (email, chat, Web forms, etc.), not in person or over the phone."¹

The champions of this new form of virtual reference aren't shy about their new-fangled alternative, nor are they about to downplay the magnitude of the changes that they fancy are upon us. The more rhetorical among them argue that reference, as we know

it, is about to change forever. They insist that the user culture has altered drastically. Fiber optics, the Internet, and patron expectations have overturned everything. In fact, the new way of approaching things is so fundamentally different from the old that reference librarians will have to transform their role radically. The new revolution will mean altered codes of conduct and altered modes of op-

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